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Originally published September 2003



Lair of the Leviathan

Top Ten Spots for Trophy Rainbows

by Troy Letherman

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All trophy trout hunters share in one bit of knowledge: to catch big trout, you must first go where they live. That search will inevitably lead toward Robert Peary's pole, as the last strongholds for large resident rainbows exist far to the north, in Alaska and on Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. These two northernmost populations of wild coastal rainbow trout, *Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus*, the subspecies scientists consider the most evolutionarily advanced form of rainbow trout, share more than superficial resemblances.

"Kamchatkan and Alaskan *O. mykiss* were probably isolated from one another only after the last ice melted and the land bridge over the Bering Sea was submerged," writes Robert J. Behnke in his definitive *Trout and Salmon of North America*. Biologically speaking, as Behnke points out, the Kamchatkan rainbow is virtually identical to its Alaskan counterpart. And now they're together again, having captured the hearts and minds of trout-mad anglers worldwide, for whom dreams come specially made with ten-pound bows leaping against sunsets that frame both the wild fish and their equally pristine surroundings. These are anglers who share in a second bit of knowledge as well: trophy trout are just as likely to hook an angler as an angler is to hook them.

So, what enables Alaska's rainbows to grow so large? Two of the primary factors are environment and genetics.

The trout of the Last Frontier's cold waters grow at a slower rate, reach sexual maturity later, and live longer than their more latitudinally-challenged cousins. Most trout of western North America join the spawning pool at two or three years and only live to see six or seven years of age. Alaskan rainbows can live upwards of ten years and might not reproduce until after their fourth or fifth year. Some rainbows from drainages like the Kvichak River have been estimated to be 14 years old or more.

Another Alaska growth incentive is the amount of biomass in the state's more productive river and lake systems. As might be expected, environments hosting large rainbows contain both rich and stable food sources. Depending on availability, larger rainbows will eschew insect and other invertebrate morsels to feed on sticklebacks, sculpins, leeches, freshwater shrimp, snails, and even small rodents such as voles, mice, and shrews- and in Alaska especially, eggs, alevins, fry, and out-migrating salmon smolt.

To continually gain mass and reach truly large proportions, a rainbow must be able to take more energy from food sources than it expends. Alaska's trout not only enjoy a higher caloric intake than many other wild stocks in North America, but the cold waters impart lower metabolic rates, a trait that is further amplified by the amount of food available, as in many areas, these rainbows do not have to work very hard to eat. Thus, Alaska rainbows aren't often driven to rise and devour the minuscule

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nutrition found in a Hexagenia hatch. And why would they, when thousands of pounds of decomposing salmon flesh and high-calorie salmon eggs are floating right through their watery dens?

Heard the old saying, "As the reds go, so go the rainbows?" While this adage may hold a certain truth, there is much more to consider in searching out Alaska's most likely lairs for trophy rainbows. Alaska is a vast state, with a diverse range of environments that result in a variety of water ecosystems. From the leopard rainbows of Bristol Bay and the silver-sided behemoths prowling mammoth lake systems like the Naknek and Iliamna to the resurrected stocks of the Talachulitna and the fabled "bows of the Upper Kenai, the one sure similarity may be the presence of trophy potential. Which is why those who've already been hooked by a runaway bolt of rainbow flock to Alaska. For them, and those looking to experience for the first time the thrill of pulling a fly tight against a thirty-inch leviathan, here are a few of the best places to begin the quest.

#1 Naknek Lake/River System:

Jason Dye, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Area Management Biologist for Bristol Bay, has much to rave over when discussing the trophy trout possibilities in his area of operation. "There are a phenomenal number of rainbow trout fisheries in Bristol Bay," he said. "It's a great place to go rainbow fishing." So much so that choosing a few top locations for trophy trout might seem like a difficult task. But it really isn't, not when two of the region's plethora of productive systems are named Naknek and Kvichak.

"I would characterize them as two of the premier wild rainbow trout fisheries in the world and certainly in North America," he continued, before closing with a compelling recommendation. "The Naknek has large numbers of 30-inch fish."

Deep, jade-colored Naknek Lake, a large oligotrophic body of water with an approximate surface area of 610 square kilometers, provides both remarkable and consistent trophy fishing potential. Naknek River, equally productive, drains the lake and flows about 30 miles west before emptying into Kvichak Bay.

There are five distinct spawning stocks of wild rainbow trout within the entire Naknek drainage: Idavain Creek, American Creek, the Naknek River, and one each above and below the falls of the wildly popular Brooks River. Though the Naknek River stock currently holds the most trophy potential, the rest of the drainage is not immune to producing the occasional 30-incher. In fact, Brooks River, which flows barely a mile in connecting Naknek Lake to Brooks Lake, was responsible for a large number of trophy catches in the past, though that number has dwindled with the increase in fishing pressure throughout the 1980s and 90s.

The Naknek's rainbow trout migrate from the lake to the river for spawning, which occurs downstream from the lake outlet in the upper nine river miles during April and May. Currently, the section of the river where the majority of spawning activity occurs, from Rapids Camp upstream to Trefon's Cabin at the lake outlet, is closed to angling from April 10 until June 7 to protect spawning stocks. On June 8, Naknek rainbow fishing resumes as anglers begin to target trout feeding on sockeye salmon smolt migrating downriver from Naknek Lake.

On the other hand, not all of the Naknek's trout are available to river anglers at that time, as it is known that a number of post-spawn trout migrate back to the lake for the summer. In 1999 approximately 1.6 million sockeye salmon spawned in the Naknek drainage, and Naknek Lake provides a substantial rearing area for the juvenile salmon, which has led many to believe the post-spawning movement of Naknek River rainbows to the lake is a feeding migration. But the simultaneous presence of a large prey base in the river, the smolt out-migration, has led others to consider the movement more of a refuge response brought on by the large influx of salmon entering the river around that time. Then again, perhaps some of the larger trout simply prefer expending less energy by returning to the lake's lighter current.

Either way, great trophy rainbow fishing can be had in the lake during the summer months, particularly in the east arm area known as the Bay of Islands, where the usually turbid water is clearer and allows the predatory trout to more effectively utilize their visual acuity. In one study, the proportion of Naknek Lake rainbow trout found in the eastern arm by the month of August had increased to 63%, while numerous others have determined that on average the fish spending their summers in Naknek

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Lake are the larger of the system's rainbows.

The lake-feeding rainbows eventually return to the river in the fall, though, some as early as August, when fishing in the Naknek heads towards another peak of angling activity that continues into October. As the autumn months progress, both the number of total fish, and the number of larger fish, increases in the river as the trout return to their preferred over-wintering habitat (some utilize Naknek Lake for over-wintering as well) and feed on the flesh of deteriorating salmon carcasses washing downstream.

However, even with all the targets, the Naknek is not a trouble-free river to fish by any means. Obvious holding water is not easy to locate, especially during the higher water of late summer and fall when prime lies are often disguised beneath deep, heavy flows. Still, the presence of the big lake fish that frequent the river make it one of a kind and worthy of a share of the number one spot.



#1 Kvichak River (tie)

As the primary outlet for giant Lake Iliamna, the Kvichak River harbors some of the world's largest wild rainbows and has long been at the head of the list for Alaska's trophy trout. The river runs clear and deep, providing perfect habitat for these spectacular resident bows, whose life histories are very similar to the big lake-resident trout of the Naknek drainage. Both the Kvichak and Naknek rivers have large trout populations that exhibit anadromous movement for spawning. That is, they migrate from the lakes to lake outlets for reproduction. Both of these trout populations are very similar to steelhead as well, the sea-run versions of *Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus*, except that the large lentic systems the Kvichak and Naknek fish migrate to after spawning are immense freshwater lakes, not open ocean. Kvichak (and Naknek) resident rainbows sport the same bright silver, lightly spotted coloration characteristic of steelhead and attain similar hefty sizes, which they carry in sleek, well-proportioned frames.

The Kvichak River lies approximately 250 miles southwest of Anchorage and is most commonly accessed by commercial flights into the village of Iliamna. From there, anglers can employ one of the many air taxis in the area to take them to almost any point along the river. The river winds from its outlet at Igliugik through coastal tundra for some 60 miles before emptying into Kvichak Bay. It's a big, fast-flowing river, where two-handed rods fished from either a boat or the bank can be productive. Flyfishers will find most of the river difficult to fish, however, and should look for a few of the better-suited stretches. Good possibilities include the lake outlet, near the cutbanks of the Kaskanak Flats (a braided section of water beginning about five miles below Lake Iliamna), and the mouths of the tributaries.

The very early spring can provide good fishing, before the post-spawn trout leave the river for the summer. Like the Naknek, trout fishing on the Kvichak really revs up again in the fall, when the heavy returns of Iliamna salmon turn the river's rainbow fishery into one of the best autumn trophy trout regions in the world.

#2 Iliamna Lake System (except the Kvichak)

The world-class productivity of the Iliamna Lake system certainly doesn't end with the Kvichak, as several of the lake's other drainages provide anglers with trophy trout potential that remains virtually unrivaled. The lake itself is Alaska's largest at approximately 1,000 square miles, and it is the world's most productive sockeye salmon system, supporting annual runs that reach into the millions. It follows then that the system would also be home to some of the world's highest concentrations of trophy rainbow trout. Recently, with the Iliamna region experiencing consecutive years of depressed sockeye returns (2003 is expected to be a third), some concern has been raised about the future of the drainages' trout populations. Jason Dye, however, says the ADF&G has been closely monitoring the situation, and that so far, there is little reason for alarm. "We're keeping a close eye on the Iliamna system," he explained. "But so far, it appears that most stocks are healthy, with catch rates and historical size composition remaining in place."

That's good news for the thousands of anglers worldwide who flock to the region every summer and fall to fish streams like the Newhalen and Copper rivers and the diminutive Lower Talarik Creek. The Newhalen River flows for about 25 miles in connecting Six Mile Lake and the adjoining Lake Clark to immense Lake Iliamna. It's

a major migration corridor for the incredible run of sockeye making their way into the far reaches of the drainage. September and October usually provide the best action for beefy Newhalen bows.

Unlike most of Alaska's best trout streams, the Copper River was made famous by dry flies. This clear water stream originates in a series of lakes in the Chigmit Mountains and runs swiftly from there the 15 miles to Iliamna's intricate Bay. It's perfectly suited for the wade-and-fish fly angler, and of course, the Copper remains one of the state's best dry fly streams, especially during June and early July. Like the other tributaries of Lake Iliamna, Copper River rainbow fishing is also good in the fall.

Lower Talarik Creek, its size in no way suggestive of the massive reputation the stream carries within the angling community, has been one of the Iliamna area's most popular trophy trout fisheries since at least the 1950s. "Lower Talarik Creek is a phenomenal fishery," echoes Dye, "an unusually small creek with unusually big rainbows."

A small isthmus separates the creek from Lake Iliamna, where many trout over 25 inches congregate well within most casters' range. However, the rainbows of Talarik Creek are often on the move, wolves searching for a quick meal, and the fishing can be spotty, as Dye also pointed out. "The fish are in and out of Lower Talarik Creek from day-to-day," he explained, "so you can get skunked." For most anglers, though, the possibility of hooking a 25-inch trophy makes the stream worth taking that chance.



#4 Kenai River

It should come as no surprise that the most popular sport fishery in Alaska is also one of its best trophy trout streams. After all, especially in Alaska, reputations are made upon the backs of big fish. Mark Gamblin, ADF&G Area Management Biologist from the Soldotna office, explained that the Kenai's most well-known trout fishery occurs above Skilak Lake, but added that the middle river, between Skilak and the confluence of the Moose River, was productive as well. "We're seeing fairly good sized fish in both sections," he concluded.

Bruce King, Area Research Biologist, had much the same to say. "The upper river garnered the reputation for trout fishing, but the rainbow population is healthy and growing throughout the whole river."

The upper river, a designated trophy trout area, issues from the outlet of Kenai Lake and flows swiftly west through a panorama of scenic mountains and forests until its emerald waters pour into glacial Skilak Lake. From there, the section known as the middle river begins, and good numbers of trophy trout are taken in the first few miles of river between Skilak and the mouth of the Funny River. But, as King and Gamblin noted, trout fishing remains good all the way past the mouth of the Moose River, though the number of potential trophies may be diminished. "Trout average 18 or 19 inches in the middle river," King explained. Almost anywhere else in North America, those would be trophies. Not here. "In general, in Alaska, we're kind of spoiled," he continued. "A 16 or 17-inch fish is such a common occurrence it's overlooked. I don't really start getting excited until a fish reaches 24 inches in length." Of that class of trophy trout, the Kenai still maintains an abundant population, though there might not be as many as there used to be.

King described the thinning of some of the river's largest stock as a natural by-product of the increase in angling pressure through the years. "The Kenai has followed the classic pattern in a fishery as participation increases," he said. "High-pressure fisheries tend to lose their very large fish, the fish that have something going for them other than an average growth rate." And, according to the Soldotna-based research biologist, who has spent years studying the river's rainbow populations, that's exactly what has occurred on the Kenai.

"There are fewer fish in the 24-inch or longer size class than there were in the mid-80s or 90s, while the total numbers of trout are increasing."

Whether or not that increase in fishing pressure has also 'quote educated' the Kenai's trout and made them harder to catch is another matter. King explained that any difficulty in hooking Kenai trophies stems more from the amount of food available than any learned behavior. "Part of the issue is you have a population of fish that don't have to work very hard to eat. They literally don't have to move." Recent underwater video footage has confirmed that fact. "There's a blizzard of fish parts floating by in the fall," King continued, "and if the fish move three inches to feed,

that's a lot."

But even with the angling pressure the Kenai receives, and even with fewer trophies present now than there were in the past, anglers still have a good chance of hooking a monster trout from one of the planet's most famous rivers. "The Kenai has to rank very high worldwide for road-accessible trout fisheries," King concluded. "Especially ones where 20-inch fish or greater can be found."

Fish Alaska technical editor Tony Weaver put it another way. "It's one of the few places where you can catch a ten-pound trout in the morning and then go have lunch at Taco Bell."

#5 Wood-Tikchik Lake System

Bearing a striking resemblance to the deep fjords of Northern Europe, the dozen lakes that make up the Wood River-Tikchik chain at the head of Bristol Bay are as stunning to behold as they are enjoyable to fish. Best accessed by making a commercial flight from Anchorage to Dillingham and then a short floatplane hop to one of the lakes, the Wood-Tikchik system presents nearly peerless rainbow trout angling possibilities, especially from August through late September.

"This is a giant area, and there's a lot of opportunity," offered Jason Dye, perhaps even understating the case. Wood-Tikchik State Park covers some 2,500 square miles, and the lakes and streams that flow throughout are literally stuffed with wild Alaska rainbows. Some of the more prominent trout locales within the system are the Wood River outlet, the Agulupak and Agulowak rivers- called the 'Pak (pack) and 'Wak (walk)- the outlet of Little Togiak Lake, the Goldenhorn and Peace Rivers, Tikchik Narrows, which connect Tikchik and Nuyakuk lakes, the mouth of the Tikchik River, and the outlet of the Nuyakuk River.

The pristine nature of the surroundings and the high numbers of the fishery have not gone unnoticed, however, as flyfishers especially have made the Wood-Tikchik region one of Alaska's top fly-in destinations. For example, according to the ADF&G, the estimated sport fishing effort on the entire Wood River Lake system ranged from 1,701 to 5,040 angler-days from 1977 through 1988. A new level of effort, ranging from 6,482 to 12,144 angler-days, began in 1989, though since about the mid-nineties, that has stabilized to about 9,000 angler-days per season. Still, as Dye points out when speaking of two of the most popular areas, the Agulupak and Agulowak rivers, the trout fishing hasn't suffered.

"The 'Pak and 'Wak received high levels of effort, but the fish are abundant in these systems," he explained. "The level of difficulty in catching fish is usually not very high. Actually, that's pretty much the story Bristol Bay-wide."

#6 Upper Nushagak River system

Long renowned for the squadrons of salmon that swarm its lower reaches, the Nushagak River and its tributaries also present a phenomenal trophy trout fishery along the upper sections. "The upper Nushagak is similar to the 'Pak and the 'Wak above Harris Creek," Dye said. "There are 18 to 22-inch fish, occasionally larger, with strong numbers and good fishing potential mixed with relatively light effort."

The immense Nushagak drainage features headwaters that stretch from the Tikchik Lakes to the highlands near Lake Clark, and its hundreds of miles of tributaries, two of which are National Wild & Scenic rivers, encompass a wide variety of both terrain and angling opportunity. The trout fishing of the upper main-stem Nushagak above Kokiganek begins to heat up later in the summer and on into fall as the returning salmon reach their spawning grounds. The mouths of the river's major tributaries- the Koktuli, Stuyahok, and Mulchatna rivers- are also extremely productive areas to wet a line.

Both the Koktuli and the Stuyahok, which drain the highlands west of Lake Iliamna, as well as the Mulchatna and its Wild & Scenic tributary, the Chilikadrotna River, are perfectly tailored for the float-minded rainbow angler. One of these headwater floats, especially when undertaken late in the summer, can land an angler amidst superb and steady trout fishing as the trout line up to feed behind the spawning salmon.



#7 Alagnak River system

Only in Alaska could a system as rich as the one surrounding the Wild & Scenic Alagnak River fall seventh on a list of trophy trout locations. Of course, only Alaska has rivers like the Alagnak, as Dye noted. "The Alagnak is a good example of most of the rivers in the Bristol Bay region," he explained. "Not quite up to the level of the Naknek and Kvichak as far as numbers of trophies go, but there are 30-inch fish there, and it's also a high-numbers fishery." He closed with a comment that anyone who has visited the region knows is quite a compliment to the rest of North America's best trout streams. "The Alagnak is comparable to anything anywhere else."

The main-stem Alagnak originates at the outlet of Kukaklek Lake and flows 70 miles before spilling into muddy Kvichak Bay. Its primary tributary, the Nonvianuk River, originates at Nonvianuk Lake south of Kukaklek Lake and joins the Alagnak after a short flow. The two lake outlets, particularly Kukaklek, have long been famous trout locales, with participation increasing both there and in the Alagnak River over the years.

ADF&G reports that pressure increased from 1,947 angler-days in 1981 to 13,232 angler-days in 1995. In both 1996 and 1997 emergency regulations were invoked preventing the retention of any Alagnak rainbow trout. Then, in 1998, the Alaska Board of Fisheries made the catch-and-release regulations permanent. Today the fishery retains its world-class quality, even with the number of visitors who annually make the trek.

Beyond the main-stem Alagnak, several other of the area's small lake tributaries offer trophy potential. "Moraine Creek and sometimes even Funnel Creek have relatively large rainbows in strong numbers," Dye explained, "with even the occasional 30-inch fish taken." Moraine Creek is a classic piece of Alaskan trout water, with nice riffles and pools that hold big fish scattered throughout. The Kukaklek and Kulik rivers and Nanuktuk Creek are noteworthy outlets for the two lakes as well, with fall being the prime time to search for 24-inch and larger rainbows.

#8 Lower Kuskokwim River Tributaries

Draining the western Alaska Range, the 800-mile-long Kuskokwim is Alaska's second largest river. The best sport fishing opportunities, and the trophy trout waters, exist in clear-water tributaries that flow from headwaters in the highlands west of the Togiak River valley into the lower Kuskokwim River and Kuskokwim Bay. The rugged Aniak River, accessed via commercial flight from Anchorage to the village of Aniak and then by float or wheelplane to several upper and mid-river points, is perhaps the most significant of these.

The Aniak flows clear and fast off the western edge of the Kuskokwim Mountains in three forks, which with their series of logjams, sweepers, and channels can heap disaster upon even experienced boaters. However, the substantial braids and river debris makes for fantastic trout habitat. The area from the confluence of the three headwaters (Aniak, Kipchuk, and Salmon rivers) downstream about nine miles to the mouth of Doestock Creek provides the best trophy trout potential.

The sparkling sapphire Kanektok River flows off the edge of the mountains in Alaska's extreme southwest corner. Accessed via commercial flight from Anchorage to either Bethel or Dillingham, then by floatplane to the headwater Kagati Lake, the Kanektok is undoubtedly one of the world's premier wilderness float rivers. The best rainbow trout habitat, of which there is plenty, seems to be from Klak Creek down, along the braided middle and lower sections of the river. Trophy trout are harder to come by here than in some of Southwest 's other rivers, but the numbers and beauty of the fish make up for it. These are the much-celebrated leopard rainbows, and at one time, the Kanektok hosted the largest number of catchable-size resident rainbow trout of any river studied by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A third lower Kuskokwim tributary worth prospecting for trophy bows is the fabulously productive Goodnews River. Flowing 375 miles southwest of Anchorage, the Goodnews is a short tundra river with outstanding opportunities for abundant and sometimes very large resident rainbows. The river is comprised of three forks, with the middle fork and main stem being the most commonly fished portions of water. Beyond just these three major Kuskokwim region streams, there are a few other trout

rivers of merit in the area, namely the Kisaralik, Arolik, Kwethluk, and Kasigluk rivers.

#9 Susitna River Drainages

Beginning in the runoff from massive glaciers in the eastern Alaska Range and the Talkeetna Mountains, the Susitna River is one of southcentral Alaska's most significant and consistent fish producers. Most of the fishing opportunity is centered in clear-water tributary streams, almost all of which already carry healthy reputations among the Alaskan angling crowd. Speaking of the region's trout populations, Dave Rutz, Area Management Biologist for Northern Cook Inlet, said true trophy specimens can be hard to come by, but the drainage's abundant populations of nice-sized rainbows are hard to beat.

"We can't grow them as big as they do out in Southwest or the Kenai River because we don't have the big lakes, the big warm water sinks, with 4.5 to 11 million sockeye returning each year," However, Rutz noted



that for roadside fisheries, both Willow and Montana creeks put out a lot of trout each year, and that as many as 10,000 fish are annually caught in Lake Creek and the Talachulitna River. He also had much praise for a fishery that may have dropped off the radar for many Southcentral trout anglers. "The Deshka's come back in the last ten or 15 years, having been rebuilt by steps, and the population currently is as high as it's ever been," Rutz continued:

The feel-good story of the Deshka is reminiscent of another Susitna tributary that had fallen on hard times, the Talachulitna, which in 1977 was the first stream in Alaska to have total catch-and-release regulations imposed on its rainbows. "The Tal as a system was in a very depressed state," Rutz said, observing that the combination of a lot of weekend floaters and very liberal retention limits (10 trout per day/20 in possession) nearly decimated the river's wild stock. "But within six or seven years of catch-and-release that system totally rebuilt to what it is now- a fantastic rainbow trout fishery."

When planning to search these Susitna tributaries for trophy bows, anglers would be wise to mind the salmon runs. "The seasonality of these fisheries depends upon the spawning nature of the salmon," Rutz explained. "Most pick up around July 15 when the kings start spawning. Before that, the fish are spread out. During spawning, however, these fish are concentrated and better targets for anglers." Rutz added that autumn is another good time for Mat-Su bound anglers to find large concentrations of fish. "In places like Lake Creek and the Tal, rainbows move into the lakes or down to the mouths of the rivers where there's better holding water, plus all the food available from salmon parts drifting downstream." Lake Creek, he noted, was especially productive during the fall, with almost no angling pressure."

Both Lake Creek and the Tal have a lot of fish in the 20-inch category," he finished. "The health of these fisheries is better now than it has been for probably 30-some years, and maybe longer."

#10 Togiak River System

Sandwiched between the renowned streams of Lower Kuskokwim Bay and the Wood-Tikchik Lakes lies the Togiak River system, a network of nine lakes, the main-stem Togiak River, and six major tributaries in the heart of the 4.7 million-acre Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. However, out of all ten areas on this list, the Togiak system may offer the fewest chances to catch rainbows in any numbers.

Wilderness float guide Renee Limeres agrees, noting that when compared to other, more trout-jammed waters of southwest Alaska, the Togiak requires a little more effort on the part of the angler. "You have to know how to fish it," he explained, "as the trout for the most part confine themselves to the mouths of the clear-water tributaries." Limeres, though, said there was plenty of reason to put in that work. "There might not be that many fish, but the ones that are there all seem to be seven pounds."

An intensely scenic waterway, the 63-mile-long Togiak drains the Togiak Lakes into Bristol Bay. It's most commonly accessed via commercial flights to Dillingham, followed by a floatplane hitch to one of the headwater lakes, usually Togiak or Upper

Togiak, or selected points downriver. A deep, wide tundra river, the Togiak is easy to float but difficult to fish. As Limeres noted, the majority of the system's rainbows, trophy or otherwise, are concentrated in the mouths of the tributaries, most notably the Gechiak, Ongivinuck, Kashiaak, Kemuk, and Pungocepuk rivers, though they're rarely found in high numbers. But as Jason Dye explained, one is all it may take. "The numbers of trout present are only moderate, but there are trophy specimens to be had." And after all, the first step in catching trophy trout is going to where they live.

Troy Letherman is the editor of Fish Alaska magazine. He can be reached at tletherman@fishalaskamagazine.com.

Author's Note: Alaska's stocks of wild rainbow trout are obviously a natural treasure, and it's my hope that they're treated as such. If planning to fish for wild rainbows, please consider practicing catch-and-release whether or not such regulations are in place.


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